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# FOUR QUARTETS



# FOUR QUARTETS,

by

T. S. ELIOT,

FABER AND FABER  
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I wish to acknowledge my obligation to friends for their criticism, and particularly to Mr John Hayward for improvements of phrase and construction



τοῦ λόγου δ' ἐόντος ξυνοῦ ζώουσιν οἱ πολλοί  
ὥς ἰδίαν ἔχοντες φρόνησιν.

*I. p. 77. Fr. 2.*

ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ αὐτή.

*I. p. 89. Fr. 60.*

**Diels:** *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker (Heraclitos).*

# BURNT NORTON

## I

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past.  
If all time is eternally present  
All time is unredeemable.  
What might have been is an abstraction  
Remaining a perpetual possibility  
Only in a world of speculation.  
What might have been and what has been  
Point to one end, which is always present.  
Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take  
Towards the door we never opened  
Into the rose-garden My words echo  
Thus, in your mind.

But to what purpose  
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves  
I do not know.

Other echoes  
Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?  
Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,  
Round the corner. Through the first gate,  
Into our first world, shall we follow  
The deception of the thrush? Into our first world.  
There they were, dignified, invisible,

Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves,  
In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air,  
And the bird called, in response to  
The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery,  
And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses  
Had the look of flowers that are looked at.  
There they were as our guests, accepted and accepting.  
So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,  
Along the empty alley, into the box circle,  
To look down into the drained pool,  
Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,  
And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,  
And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,  
The surface glittered out of heart of light,  
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.  
Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.  
Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,  
Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.  
Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind  
Cannot bear very much reality.  
Time past and time future  
What might have been and what has been  
Point to one end, which is always present.

## II

Garlic and sapphires in the mud  
Clot the bedded axle-tree.  
The trilling wire in the blood,  
Sings below inveterate scars  
Appeasing long forgotten wars.

The dance along the artery  
The circulation of the lymph  
Are figured in the drift of stars  
Ascend to summer in the tree  
We move above the moving tree  
In light upon the figured leaf  
And hear upon the sodden floor  
Below, the boarhound and the boar  
Pursue their pattern as before  
But reconciled among the stars.

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor  
fleshless ;  
Neither from nor towards , at the still point, there the dance  
is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered Neither movement  
from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still  
point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.  
I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say where.  
And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time  
The inner freedom from the practical desire,  
The release from action and suffering, release from the  
inner  
And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded  
By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving,  
*Erhebung* without motion, concentration  
Without elimination, both a new world  
And the old made explicit, understood

In the completion of its partial ecstasy,  
The resolution of its partial horror.  
Yet the enchainment of past and future  
Woven in the weakness of the changing body,  
Protects mankind from heaven and damnation  
Which flesh cannot endure.

Time past and time future  
Allow but a little consciousness.  
To be conscious is not to be in time  
But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,  
The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,  
The moment in the draughty church at smokefall  
Be remembered, involved with past and future.  
Only through time time is conquered.

### III

Here is a place of disaffection  
Time before and time after  
In a dim light: neither daylight  
Investing form with lucid stillness  
Turning shadow into transient beauty  
With slow rotation suggesting permanence  
Nor darkness to purify the soul  
Emptying the sensual with deprivation  
Cleansing affection from the temporal.  
Neither plenitude nor vacancy. Only a flicker  
Over the strained time-ridden faces  
Distracted from distraction by distraction  
Filled with fancies and empty of meaning  
Tumid apathy with no concentration  
Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind

That blows before and after time,  
Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs  
Time before and time after.  
Eructation of unhealthy souls  
Into the faded air, the torpid  
Driven on the wind that sweeps the gloomy hills of London,  
Hampstead and Clerkenwell, Campden and Putney,  
Highgate, Primrose and Ludgate. Not here  
Not here the darkness, in this twittering world.

Descend lower, descend only  
Into the world of perpetual solitude,  
World not world, but that which is not world,  
Internal darkness, deprivation  
And destitution of all property,  
Desiccation of the world of sense,  
Evacuation of the world of fancy,  
Inoperancy of the world of spirit;  
This is the one way, and the other  
Is the same, not in movement  
But abstention from movement; while the world moves  
In appetency, on its metallated ways  
Of time past and time future.

#### IV

Time and the bell have buried the day,  
The black cloud carries the sun away.  
Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis  
Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray  
Clutch and cling?

## Chill

Fingers of yew be curled  
Down on us? After the kingfisher's wing  
Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is still  
At the still point of the turning world.

## V

Words move, music moves  
Only in time; but that which is only living  
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach  
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,  
Can words or music reach  
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still  
Moves perpetually in its stillness.  
Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,  
Not that only, but the co-existence,  
Or say that the end precedes the beginning,  
And the end and the beginning were always there  
Before the beginning and after the end.  
And all is always now. Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
Will not stay still. Shrieking voices  
Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,  
Always assail them. The Word in the desert  
Is most attacked by voices of temptation,  
The crying shadow in the funeral dance,  
The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera

The detail of the pattern is movement,  
As in the figure of the ten stairs.

Desire itself is movement  
Not in itself desirable,  
Love is itself unmoving,  
Only the cause and end of movement,  
Timeless, and undesiring  
Except in the aspect of time  
Caught in the form of limitation  
Between un-being and being.  
Sudden in a shaft of sunlight  
Even while the dust moves  
There rises the hidden laughter  
Of children in the foliage  
Quick now, here, now, always—  
Ridiculous the waste sad time  
Stretching before and after.





# EAST COKER

## I

In my beginning is my end. In succession  
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,  
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place  
Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass,  
Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,  
Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth  
Which is already flesh, fur and faeces,  
Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf,  
Houses live and die: there is a time for building  
And a time for living and for generation  
And a time for the wind to break the loosened pane  
And to shake the wainscot <sup>wooden paneling</sup> where the field-mouse <sup>is on a beam</sup> trots  
And to shake the tattered arras woven with a silent motto,

In my beginning is my end. Now the light falls  
Across the open field, leaving the deep lane  
Shuttered with branches, dark in the afternoon,  
Where you lean against a bank while a van passes,  
And the deep lane insists on the direction  
Into the village, in the electric heat  
Hypnotised. In a warm haze the sultry light  
Is absorbed, not refracted, by grey stone.  
The dahlias sleep in the empty silence.  
Wait for the early owl.

In that open field  
If you do not come too close, if you do not come too close  
On a summer midnight, you can hear the music  
Of the weak pipe and the little drum  
And see them dancing around the bonfire  
The association of man and woman  
In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie—  
A dignified and commodious sacrament.  
Two and two, necessarye coniunction,  
Holding eche other by the hand or the arm  
Whiche betokeneth concorde. Round and round the fire  
Leaping through the flames, or joined in circles,  
Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter  
Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,  
Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth  
Mirth of those long since under earth  
Nourishing the corn Keeping time,  
Keeping the rhythm in their dancing  
As in their living in the living seasons  
The time of the seasons and the constellations  
The time of milking and the time of harvest  
The time of the coupling of man and woman  
And that of beasts. Feet rising and falling.  
Eating and drinking. Dung and death. '

Dawn points, and another day  
Prepares for heat and silence. Out at sea the dawn wind  
Wrinkles and slides. I am here   
Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning.

What is the late November doing  
 With the disturbance of the spring  
 And creatures of the summer heat,  
 And snowdrops writhing under feet  
 And hollyhocks that aim too high  
 Red into grey and tumble down  
 Late roses filled with early snow?  
 Thunder rolled by the rolling stars  
 Simulates triumphal cars  
 Deployed in constellated wars  
 Scorpion fights against the Sun  
 Until the Sun and Moon go down  
 Comets weep and Leonids fly  
 Hunt the heavens and the plains  
 Whirled in a vortex that shall bring  
 The world to that destructive fire  
 Which burns before the ice-cap reigns.

That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory:  
 A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,  
 Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle  
 With words and meanings. The poetry does not matter  
 It was not (to start again) what one had expected.  
 What was to be the value of the long looked forward to,  
 Long hoped for calm, the autumnal serenity  
 And the wisdom of age? Had they deceived us  
 Or deceived themselves, the quiet-voiced elders,  
 Bequeathing us merely a receipt for deceit?  
 The serenity only a deliberate hebetude,

The wisdom only the knowledge of dead secrets  
Useless in the darkness into which they peered  
Or from which they turned their eyes. There is, it seems to  
us,

At best, only a limited value  
In the knowledge derived from experience.  
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,  
For the pattern is new in every moment  
And every moment is a new and shocking  
Valuation of all we have been. We are only undeceived  
Of that which, deceiving, could no longer harm.  
In the middle, not only in the middle of the way  
But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble,  
On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold,  
And menaced by monsters, fancy lights,  
Risking enchantment. Do not let me hear  
Of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly,  
Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession,  
Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God.  
The only wisdom we can hope to acquire  
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.

The houses are all gone under the sea.

The dancers are all gone under the hill.

### III

O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,  
The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant,  
The captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters,

The generous patrons of art, the statesmen and the rulers,  
Distinguished civil servants, chairmen of many committees,  
Industrial lords and petty contractors, all go into the dark,  
And dark the Sun and Moon, and the Almanach de Gotha  
And the Stock Exchange Gazette, the Directory of Directors,  
And cold the sense and lost the motive of action.  
And we all go with them, into the silent funeral,  
Nobody's funeral, for there is no one to bury.  
I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you  
Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre,  
The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed  
With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness  
    on darkness,  
And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant  
    panorama  
And the bold imposing façade are all being rolled away—  
Or as, when an underground train, in the tube, stops too  
    long between stations  
And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence  
And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen  
Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about;  
Or when, under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious  
    of nothing—  
I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope  
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without  
    love  
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet  
    faith  
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.  
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:  
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning.  
The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,  
The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy  
Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony  
Of death and birth.

You say I am repeating  
Something I have said before. I shall say it again.  
Shall I say it again? In order to arrive there,  
To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,  
You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.  
In order to arrive at what you do not know  
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.  
In order to possess what you do not possess  
You must go by the way of dispossession.  
In order to arrive at what you are not  
You must go through the way in which you are not.  
And what you do not know is the only thing you know  
And what you own is what you do not own  
And where you are is where you are not.

#### I V

The wounded surgeon plies the steel  
That questions the distempered part;  
Beneath the bleeding hands we feel  
The sharp compassion of the healer's art  
Resolving the enigma of the fever chart.

Our only health is the disease  
If we obey the dying nurse

Whose constant care is not to please  
But to remind of our, and Adam's curse,  
And that, to be restored, our sickness must grow worse.

The whole earth is our hospital  
Endowed by the ruined millionaire,  
Wherein, if we do well, we shall  
Die of the absolute paternal care  
That will not leave us, but prevents us everywhere.

The chill ascends from feet to knees,  
The fever sings in mental wires.  
If to be warmed, then I must freeze  
And quake in frigid purgatorial fires  
Of which the flame is roses, and the smoke is briars.

The dripping blood our only drink,  
The bloody flesh our only food:  
In spite of which we like to think  
That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood—  
Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good.

## V

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—  
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres*—  
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt  
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure  
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words  
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which



One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture  
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate  
With shabby equipment always deteriorating  
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,  
Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to  
conquer  
By strength and submission, has already been discovered  
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot  
hope  
To emulate—but there is no competition—  
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost  
And found and lost again and again: and now, under condi-  
tions  
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.  
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.

Home is where one starts from. As we grow older  
The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated  
Of dead and living. Not the intense moment  
Isolated, with no before and after,  
But a lifetime burning in every moment  
And not the lifetime of one man only  
But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.  
There is a time for the evening under starlight,  
A time for the evening under lamplight  
(The evening with the photograph album).  
Love is most nearly itself  
When here and now cease to matter.  
Old men ought to be explorers  
Here and there does not matter  
We must be still and still moving

Into another intensity  
For a further union, a deeper communion  
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,  
The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters  
Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning.



# THE DRY SALVAGES

(The Dry Salvages—presumably *les trois sauvages*—is a small group of rocks, with a beacon, off the N.E. coast of Cape Ann, Massachusetts. *Salvages* is pronounced to rhyme with *assuages*. *Groaner*: a whistling buoy.)

## I

I do not know much about gods ; but I think that the river  
Is a strong brown god—sullen, untamed and intractable,  
Patient to some degree, at first recognised as a frontier ;  
Useful, untrustworthy, as a conveyor of commerce,  
Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges.  
The problem once solved, the brown god is almost forgotten  
By the dwellers in cities—ever, however, implacable,  
Keeping his seasons and rages, destroyer, reminder  
Of what men choose to forget. Unhonoured, unpropitiated  
By worshippers of the machine, but waiting, watching and  
waiting.

His rhythm was present in the nursery bedroom,  
In the rank ailanthus of the April dooryard,  
In the smell of grapes on the autumn table,  
And the evening circle in the winter gaslight.

The river is within us, the sea is all about us ;  
The sea is the land's edge also, the granite  
Into which it reaches, the beaches where it tosses  
Its hints of earlier and other creation :  
The starfish, the horseshoe crab, the whale's backbone ;

The pools where it offers to our curiosity  
The more delicate algae and the sea anemone.  
It tosses up our losses, the torn seine,  
The shattered lobsterpot, the broken oar  
And the gear of foreign dead men. The sea has many voices,  
Many gods and many voices.

The salt is on the briar rose,

The fog is in the fir trees.

The sea howl

And the sea yelp, are different voices  
Often together heard: the whine in the rigging,  
The menace and caress of wave that breaks on water,  
The distant rattle in the granite teeth,  
And the wailing warning from the approaching headland  
Are all sea voices, and the heaving groaner  
Rounded homewards, and the seagull.  
And under the oppression of the silent fog  
The tolling bell  
Measures time not our time, rung by the unhurried  
Ground swell, a time  
Older than the time of chronometers, older  
Than time counted by anxious worried women  
Lying awake, calculating the future,  
Trying to unweave, unwind, unravel  
And piece together the past and the future,  
Between midnight and dawn, when the past is all deception,  
The future futureless, before the morning watch  
When time stops and time is never ending;  
And the ground swell, that is and was from the beginning,  
Clangs  
The bell.)

## II

Where is there an end of it, the soundless wailing,  
 The silent withering of autumn flowers  
 Dropping their petals and remaining motionless;  
 Where is there an end to the drifting wreckage,  
 The prayer of the bone on the beach, the unprayerable  
 Prayer at the calamitous annunciation?

There is no end, but addition: the trailing  
 Consequence of further days and hours,  
 While emotion takes to itself the emotionless  
 Years of living among the breakage  
 Of what was believed in as the most reliable—  
 And therefore the fittest for renunciation.

There is the final addition, the failing  
 Pride or resentment at failing powers,  
 The unattached devotion which might pass for devotionless,  
 In a drifting boat with a slow leakage,  
 The silent listening to the undeniable  
 Clamour of the bell of the last annunciation.

Where is the end of them, the fishermen sailing  
 Into the wind's tail, where the fog cowers?  
 We cannot think of a time that is oceanless  
 Or of an ocean not littered with wastage  
 Or of a future that is not liable  
 Like the past, to have no destination.

We have to think of them as forever bailing,  
 Setting and hauling, while the North East lowers

Over shallow banks unchanging and erosionless  
Or drawing their money, drying sails at dockage;  
Not as making a trip that will be unpayable  
For a haul that will not bear examination.

There is no end of it, the voiceless wailing,  
No end to the withering of withered flowers,  
To the movement of pain that is painless and motionless,  
To the drift of the sea and the drifting wreckage,  
The bone's prayer to Death its God. Only the hardly, barely  
    prayable  
Prayer of the one Annunciation.

It seems, as one becomes older,  
That the past has another pattern, and ceases to be a mere  
    sequence—  
Or even development: the latter a partial fallacy  
Encouraged by superficial notions of evolution,  
Which becomes, in the popular mind, a means of disowning  
    the past.  
The moments of happiness—not the sense of well-being,  
Fruition, fulfilment, security or affection,  
Or even a very good dinner, but the sudden illumination—  
We had the experience but missed the meaning,  
And approach to the meaning restores the experience  
In a different form, beyond any meaning  
We can assign to happiness. I have said before  
That the past experience revived in the meaning  
Is not the experience of one life only  
But of many generations—not forgetting  
Something that is probably quite ineffable:

The backward look behind the assurance  
Of recorded history, the backward half-look  
Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror.  
Now, we come to discover that the moments of agony  
(Whether, or not, due to misunderstanding,  
Having hoped for the wrong things or dreaded the wrong  
things,  
Is not in question) are likewise permanent  
With such permanence as time has. We appreciate this  
better  
In the agony of others, nearly experienced,  
Involving ourselves, than in our own.  
For our own past is covered by the currents of action,  
But the torment of others remains an experience  
Unqualified, unworn by subsequent attrition.  
People change, and smile: but the agony abides.  
Time the destroyer is time the preserver,  
Like the river with its cargo of dead negroes, cows and  
chicken coops,  
The bitter apple and the bite in the apple.  
And the ragged rock in the restless waters,  
Waves wash over it, fogs conceal it;  
On a halcyon day it is merely a monument,  
In navigable weather it is always a seamark  
To lay a course by: but in the sombre season  
Or the sudden fury, is what it always was.

### III

I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant—  
Among other things—or one way of putting the same thing.



That the future is a faded song, a Royal Rose or a lavender  
spray  
Of wistful regret for those who are not yet here to regret,  
Pressed between yellow leaves of a book that has never been  
opened.  
And the way up is the way down, the way forward is the  
way back.  
You cannot face it steadily, but this thing is sure,  
That time is no healer: the patient is no longer here.  
When the train starts, and the passengers are settled  
To fruit, periodicals and business letters  
(And those who saw them off have left the platform)  
Their faces relax from grief into relief,  
To the sleepy rhythm of a hundred hours.  
Fare forward, travellers! not escaping from the past  
Into different lives, or into any future;  
You are not the same people who left that station  
Or who will arrive at any terminus,  
While the narrowing rails slide together behind you;  
And on the deck of the drumming liner  
Watching the furrow that widens behind you,  
You shall not think 'the past is finished'  
Or 'the future is before us'.  
At nightfall, in the rigging and the aerial,  
Is a voice descanting (though not to the ear,  
The murmuring shell of time, and not in any language)  
'Fare forward, you who think that you are voyaging;  
You are not those who saw the harbour  
Receding, or those who will disembark.  
Here between the hither and the farther shore  
While time is withdrawn, consider the future

And the past with an equal mind.  
At the moment which is not of action or inaction  
You can receive this: "on whatever sphere of being  
The mind of a man may be intent  
At the time of death"—that is the one action  
(And the time of death is every moment)  
Which shall fructify in the lives of others:  
And do not think of the fruit of action.  
Fare forward.

O voyagers, O seamen,  
You who come to port, and you whose bodies  
Will suffer the trial and judgement of the sea,  
Or whatever event, this is your real destination.'  
So Krishna, as when he admonished Arjuna  
On the field of battle.

Not fare well,  
But fare forward, voyagers.

#### IV

Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory,  
Pray for all those who are in ships, those  
Whose business has to do with fish, and  
Those concerned with every lawful traffic  
And those who conduct them.

Repeat a prayer also on behalf of  
Women who have seen their sons or husbands  
Setting forth, and not returning:  
Figlia del tuo figlio,  
Queen of Heaven.

Also pray for those who were in ships, and  
Ended their voyage on the sand, in the sea's lips  
Or in the dark throat which will not reject them  
Or wherever cannot reach them the sound of the sea bell's  
Perpetual angelus.

V

To communicate with Mars, converse with spirits,  
To report the behaviour of the sea monster,  
Describe the horoscope, haruspicate or scry,  
Observe disease in signatures, evoke  
Biography from the wrinkles of the palm  
And tragedy from fingers; release omens  
By sortilege, or tea leaves, riddle the inevitable  
With playing cards, fiddle with pentagrams  
Or barbituric acids, or dissect  
The recurrent image into pre-conscious terrors—  
To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams; all these are  
usual

Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press:  
And always will be, some of them especially  
When there is distress of nations and perplexity  
Whether on the shores of Asia, or in the Edgware Road.  
Men's curiosity searches past and future  
And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend  
The point of intersection of the timeless  
With time, is an occupation for the saint—  
No occupation either, but something given  
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,  
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.  
For most of us, there is only the unattended

Moment, the moment in and out of time,  
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,  
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning  
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply  
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music  
While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses,  
Hints followed by guesses ; and the rest  
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.  
The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.

Here the impossible union  
Of spheres of existence is actual,  
Here the past and future  
Are conquered, and reconciled,  
Where action were otherwise movement  
Of that which is only moved  
And has in it no source of movement—  
Driven by dæmonic, chthonic  
Powers. And right action is freedom  
From past and future also.  
For most of us, this is the aim  
Never here to be realised ;  
Who are only undefeated  
Because we have gone on trying ;  
We, content at the last  
If our temporal reversion nourish  
(Not too far from the yew-tree)  
The life of significant soil.



# LITTLE GIDDING

## I

Midwinter spring is its own season  
Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown,  
Suspended in time, between pole and tropic.  
When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire,  
The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches,  
In windless cold that is the heart's heat,  
Reflecting in a watery mirror  
A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.  
And glow more intense than blaze of branch, or brazier,  
Stirs the dumb spirit: no wind, but pentecostal fire  
In the dark time of the year. Between melting and freezing  
The soul's sap quivers. There is no earth smell  
Or smell of living thing. This is the spring time  
But not in time's covenant. Now the hedgerow  
Is blanched for an hour with transitory blossom  
Of snow, a bloom more sudden  
Than that of summer, neither budding nor fading,  
Not in the scheme of generation.  
Where is the summer, the unimaginable  
Zero summer?

        If you came this way,  
Taking the route you would be likely to take  
From the place you would be likely to come from,  
If you came this way in may time, you would find the hedges



Here, the intersection of the timeless moment  
Is England and nowhere. Never and always,

II

Ash on an old man's sleeve  
Is all the ash the burnt roses leave.  
Dust in the air suspended  
Marks the place where a story ended.  
Dust inbreathed was a house—  
The wall, the wainscot and the mouse.  
The death of hope and despair,  
    This is the death of air.

There are flood and drouth  
Over the eyes and in the mouth,  
Dead water and dead sand  
Contending for the upper hand.  
The parched eviscerate soil  
Gapes at the vanity of toil,  
Laughs without mirth.  
    This is the death of earth.

Water and fire succeed  
The town, the pasture and the weed.  
Water and fire deride  
The sacrifice that we denied.  
Water and fire shall rot  
The marred foundations we forgot,  
Of sanctuary and choir.  
    This is the death of water and fire.



In the uncertain hour before the morning  
Near the ending of interminable night  
At the recurrent end of the unending  
After the dark dove with the flickering tongue  
Had passed below the horizon of his homing  
While the dead leaves still rattled on like tin  
Over the asphalt where no other sound was  
Between three districts whence the smoke arose  
I met one walking, loitering and hurried  
As if blown towards me like the metal leaves  
Before the urban dawn wind unresisting.  
And as I fixed upon the down-turned face  
That pointed scrutiny with which we challenge  
The first-met stranger in the waning dusk  
I caught the sudden look of some dead master  
Whom I had known, forgotten, half recalled  
Both one and many; in the brown baked features  
The eyes of a familiar compound ghost  
Both intimate and unidentifiable.  
So I assumed a double part, and cried  
And heard another's voice cry: 'What! are *you* here?'  
Although we were not. I was still the same,  
Knowing myself yet being someone other—  
And he a face still forming; yet the words sufficed  
To compel the recognition they preceded.  
And so, compliant to the common wind,  
Too strange to each other for misunderstanding,  
In concord at this intersection time  
Of meeting nowhere, no before and after,  
We trod the pavement in a dead patrol.  
I said: 'The wonder that I feel is easy,

Yet ease is cause of wonder. Therefore speak:  
 I may not comprehend, may not remember.'  
 And he: 'I am not eager to rehearse  
 My thought and theory which you have forgotten.  
 These things have served their purpose: let them be.  
 So with your own, and pray they be forgiven  
 By others, as I pray you to forgive  
 Both bad and good. Last season's fruit is eaten  
 And the fullfed beast shall kick the empty pail.  
 For last year's words belong to last year's language  
 And next year's words await another voice.  
 But, as the passage now presents no hindrance  
 To the spirit unappeased and peregrine  
 Between two worlds become much like each other,  
 So I find words I never thought to speak  
 In streets I never thought I should revisit  
 When I left my body on a distant shore.  
 Since our concern was speech, and speech impelled us  
 To purify the dialect of the tribe  
 And urge the mind to aftersight and foresight,  
 Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age  
 To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort.  
 First, the cold friction of expiring sense  
 Without enchantment, offering no promise  
 X But bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit  
 As body and soul begin to fall asunder.  
 Second, the conscious impotence of rage  
 At human folly, and the laceration  
 Of laughter at what ceases to amuse.  
 And last, the rending pain of re-enactment  
 Of all that you have done, and been; the shame

Of motives late revealed, and the awareness  
Of things ill done and done to others' harm  
Which once you took for exercise of virtue.  
Then fools' approval stings, and honour stains.  
From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit  
Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire  
Where you must move in measure, like a dancer '   
The day was breaking. In the disfigured street  
He left me, with a kind of valediction,  
And faded on the blowing of the horn.

### III

There are three conditions which often look alike  
Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow:  
Attachment to self and to things and to persons, detachment  
From self and from things and from persons; and, growing  
between them, indifference  
Which resembles the others as death resembles life,  
Being between two lives—unflowering, between  
The live and the dead nettle. This is the use of memory:  
For liberation—not less of love but expanding  
Of love beyond desire, and so liberation  
From the future as well as the past. Thus, love of a country  
Begins as attachment to our own field of action  
And comes to find that action of little importance  
Though never indifferent. History may be servitude,  
History may be freedom. See, now they vanish,  
The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved  
them,

To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.  
Sin is Behovely, but  
All shall be well, and  
All manner of thing shall be well.  
If I think, again, of this place,  
-And of people, not wholly commendable,  
Of no immediate kin or kindness,  
But some of peculiar genius,  
All touched by a common genius,  
United in the strife which divided them;  
If I think of a king at nightfall,  
Of three men, and more, on the scaffold  
And a few who died forgotten  
In other places, here and abroad,  
And of one who died blind and quiet,  
Why should we celebrate  
These dead men more than the dying?  
It is not to ring the bell backward  
Nor is it an incantation  
To summon the spectre of a Rose  
We cannot revive old factions  
We cannot restore old policies  
Or follow an antique drum.  
These men, and those who opposed them  
And those whom they opposed  
Accept the constitution of silence  
And are folded in a single party  
Whatever we inherit from the fortunate  
We have taken from the defeated  
What they had to leave us—a symbol:  
A symbol perfected in death.

And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing shall be well  
By the purification of the motive  
In the ground of our beseeching.

#### IV

The dove descending breaks the air  
With flame of incandescent terror  
Of which the tongues declare  
The one discharge from sin and error.  
The only hope, or else despair  
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—  
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

Who then devised the torment? Love.  
Love is the unfamiliar Name  
Behind the hands that wove  
The intolerable shirt of flame  
Which human power cannot remove.  
We only live, only suspire  
Consumed by either fire or fire.

#### V

What we call the beginning is often the end  
And to make an end is to make a beginning.  
The end is where we start from. And every phrase  
And sentence that is right (where every word is at home,  
Taking its place to support the others,  
The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,

An easy commerce of the old and the new,  
The common word exact without vulgarity,  
The formal word precise but not pedantic,  
The complete consort dancing together)  
Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,  
Every poem an epitaph. And any action  
Is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat  
Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.  
We die with the dying:  
See, they depart, and we go with them.  
We are born with the dead:  
See, they return, and bring us with them.  
The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree  
Are of equal duration. A people without history  
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern  
Of timeless moments. So, while the light fails  
On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel  
History is now and England.

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of an our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
Through the unknown, remembered gate  
When the last of earth left to discover  
Is that which was the beginning;  
At the source of the longest river  
The voice of the hidden waterfall

And the children in the apple-tree  
Not known, because not looked for  
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness  
Between two waves of the sea.  
Quick now, here, now, always—  
A condition of complete simplicity  
(Costing not less than everything)  
And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing shall be well  
When the tongues of flame are in-folded  
Into the crowned knot of fire  
And the fire and the rose are one.

